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A SURVEY OF AMERICAN HISTORY INSTRUCTION FOR DISADVANTAGED YOUTH IN THE WASHINGTON, D.C., PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

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AS PART OF A FIVE-CITY SURVEY OF THE AMERICAN HISTORY CURRICULUM TAUGHT IN DISADVANTAGED SCHOOLS TO MINORITY GROUP CHILDREN, THIS PLAN OUTLINES THE PROCEDURES TO BE USED IN GATHERING DATA IN WASHINGTON, D.C. INFORMATION ON THE REACTION OF NEGRO CHILDREN TO AMERICAN HISTORY INSTRUCTION IN THE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS WILL BE OBTAINED THROUGH STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS AND BY EXAMINING TEACHING MATERIALS. THE OUTLINE OF THE PLAN CONTAINS THE INTERVIEW OUTLINES FOR USE WITH PUPILS, TEACHERS, AND ADMINISTRATORS AND SUPERVISORS. THIS ARTICLE IS PUBLISHED IN HISTORICAL EVALUATION AND RESEARCH ORGANIZATION, WASHINGTON, D.C., "HISTORY AND URBAN EDUCATION, A FIVE-CITY SURVEY PLAN 1964-1965," 1964. (NH)

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A SURVEY OF AMERICAN HISTORY INSTRUCTION FOR DISADVANTAGED YOUTH IN THE WASHINGTON, D. C., PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Introduction

This plan is focused on the problem as stated in the minutes of the Second Planning Conference: "To ascertain the extent to which underprivileged minority group school children in urban communities identify themselves with, and are interested in, American History as it is taught in their schools."

Methods To Be Used

Structured interviews of pupils, teachers, and administrators will be the primary method used to gain information on the reaction of Negro children (the particular minority group in the Washington, D. C., part of the study) to American History as presently taught in Washington. The interviews will be supplemented by reviews of appropriate records and cursory examinations of selected printed materials relating to the American History curriculum such as textbooks and curriculum guides.

Although the structured interview technique may not be completely objective or "scientific," we believe that it is a sound way to secure general knowledge about a school or school system. This approach is used in evaluating colleges and universities in Pennsylvania and other states for purposes of program approval. The Middle States Association also uses the same approach in its school and college evaluations. Errors are made using this technique, but most of the major ones can be located and corrected, by submitting a preliminary report of the findings to officials of the evaluated school for a review of the general accuracy of the report. Their reaction is, of course, further "checked" by the findings of the outside study team. This method has considerable advantage over the use of a regular questionnaire. A questionnaire allows little or no room for interpretations and qualifications to fit unique local situations. Questionnaires may be completely misinterpreted and the answers quite different from what they would be if the person answering the questionnaire had been able to talk to the person who wrote the set of questions. The structured interview on the other hand, uses an open-ended set of questions that not only helps to secure the advantage of the consistency of

a questionnaire, but can lead to added, pertinent information as well as get a subtle shading of attitudes, values, and interests.

Several precautionary checks on the accuracy and validity of the study will be used:

1. The General Consultants will review the design of this study to make certain that it is in fact focused on the central problem, i.e., determining whether Negro children in Washington are interested in American History, and identify themselves with it, and that it is sound enough to secure the needed data.

2. Dr. Theodore Libber of the Washington schools will critically review the plan for the study in order to check its feasibility in relation to the school system.

3. The study will be carried out by competent professionals who have had experience with the structured interview technique.

4. The tentative findings of the study team will be reviewed by school district personnel who are familiar with the local situation. These persons will (a) correct any errors of fact in the report, and (b) present added information in any cases where it is felt that members of the study team have made questionable judgments. The study team, however, will make the final decisions on what is included in the final report.

It is believed by members of the study team that they can use this method to describe accurately the status of American History instruction in Washington, as it relates to Negro children.

Selection of Schools

The schools to be studied will be selected by Dr. Libber of the Washington, D. C., school system. Selected schools should be typical* of the schools attended by Negro children in that system. Two schools, one elementary and one secondary will be chosen randomly from Group 2 schools as defined below*. If a new program in American History (or social studies including history) has been

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* Typical school--a school which falls roughly between two extremes of schools, as judged by those who know the school system intimately. Schools at "1," for example, might be those with educational problems that are much greater than either "2" or "3"

introduced into any Washington schools that are not considered to be typical schools, at least one of these schools with a new program will be added to the list, and identified as typical.

Duration of the Study

At least three days shall be spent by the study team members interviewing pupils, teachers, and administrators in the two selected schools. Pertinent work as necessary will be done after the visit, to insure a final report that reflects as accurately as possible the affect of American History on pupils in the schools of Washington, D. C.

Study Team

Richard Gibboney, Pennsylvania Department of Public Instruction
Norman Miller, Pennsylvania Department of Public Instruction
One other member of educational consultant team

Selection of Interviewees

Pupils

At least 3 pupils per class will be randomly selected for interview from randomly selected classes from the two schools selected for study. This means that approximately 18 elementary and 18 secondary school pupils will be interviewed.

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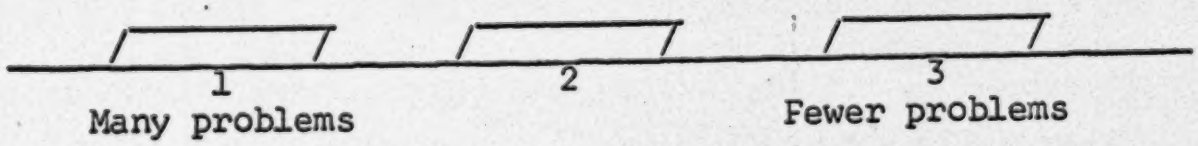
schools. Schools at "3" might be those schools in which special efforts were made to solve educational problems of the pupils, and where conditions are now much improved over what they were two or three years ago. "2" schools would be considered typical.



Teachers

Teachers of the randomly selected pupils will be interviewed. Approximately 6 elementary and 6 secondary teachers will be interviewed.

Note: In a three-day period, allowing half of the time to interview pupils and half to interview teachers, three interviewers can contact the number of pupils and teachers indicated.

Thrust of the Interviews

The interviews of pupils, teachers, and administrators will be structured as outlined below. Questions may not be asked in the exact words shown here, however. Depending on the particular interviewee (and interviewer), it might take two, three, or more questions to secure the information called for by the written question. It should be kept in mind that every question below is to be related to the primary concern of this study, which is, the degree of identification with American History by Negro pupils in Washington, D. C., schools.

Teacher

Introductory statement, to be used by the study team member just prior to the structured interview with each teacher:

"I am helping to conduct a study for HERO in order to help determine the status of the teaching of American History. There are some special topics that we wish to discuss, but first let me ask you some general questions."

1. What are the major aims of the teacher in his American History classes? (Interviewer, note whether or not he mentions the minority group problem on which this study is focused.)

2. What major problems does the teacher see in his teaching of American History? (Interviewer, note whether or not he mentions the minority group problem on which this study is focused.)

3. What does he believe could be done to help him overcome the major problems that he identifies in #2 above?

4. What is the teacher's opinion as to the popularity of American History as compared to other major subjects? (Ask him to rank American History, English/language arts (including formal reading), mathematics, and science in order of popularity that he thinks the students would rank them.)

5. What is the teacher's method(s) of teaching American History to his pupils? (Interviewer, pursue this question until you have a clear idea of the usual way that he teaches. Does the textbook serve as the sole source of information? Is information the sole end of instruction? Is there frequent discussion of ideas and ideals and of how they relate to Americans today? etc.)

At this point the interviewer will introduce the following statement into the discussion:

"One major concern of HERO is whether or not American History courses, as now being taught, help minority group children to identify themselves with our cultural heritage. Do minority group children develop as much interest in American History as other pupils? Our study team was asked to talk to persons in the Washington schools because they represent an integrated school system with a large number of Negro children. Other HERO study teams are to interview in systems where there are Spanish-American, Puerto Rican, Oriental, and Indian minorities. With this problem in mind, let me ask you a few more questions."

6. What is the teacher's reaction to the problem on which HERO has focused? Does he see it as a valid problem? Is it one that he believes might be ameliorated through instruction in American History? (If he disagrees with the HERO position, skip question #7.)

7. What does he believe could be done to help solve the problem posed by HERO?

8. What major factors does the teacher believe help student learning in his particular situation? What factors hinder it? Are these factors in any way different between Negro and Caucasian pupils, in his opinion?

9. What general, academic, and/or professional education does the teacher have that may specifically help him to teach underprivileged Negro children? What particular education might give him this kind of help?

10. What experience, other than teaching in Washington, has the teacher had that may specifically help him to teach underprivileged Negro children? What particular experiences might have given him this kind of help?

11. What other kinds of information or questions, connected with the HERO problem, does the teacher think of or wish to discuss?

Students

Introductory statement, to be used by the study team member just prior to the structured interview with each pupil:

"I am one of three men talking to several pupils and teachers in _____ School and in other Washington Schools. We are trying to get information that we hope will make teaching better and schools more helpful. I am going to write down some of the answers you give me, but I am not going to write your name on the paper because I don't need to know who tells me these things. I need to write some things down because I don't want to forget them. I'm sure that after talking with pupils and teachers for three days I would forget many important things. I hope you will tell me exactly how you feel, when I ask you these questions."

1. (a) Have you ever thought about becoming a teacher?
   (b) What is there about teaching that you think you might like?
   (c) That you might not like?
   (d) What do teachers do that bothers you quite a bit?

2. If you were a teacher, what subject would you like to teach most of all?

   (If the pupil chooses history, then ask:)

3. (a) What is there about history that interests you so much?

   (If the pupil does not choose history, then ask:)

   (b) Why would you rather teach _____ than American History?
   (c) Is there something about history that you don't especially like?

4. (a) If you could be any famous person that you have studied about in American History, who would you like to be?

(b) What was so interesting about this thing or person?

5. (a) In your history classes, have you ever studied about any famous American Negro men or women? In any classes other than history?
   (b) Who?
   (c) What did each of these famous Americans do?

6. Who are some famous American Negro men and women that you know about who are alive today? What are they famous for? (Interviewer, the attempt here is to find out if any identification is being made with current persons, other than in the entertainment world.)

7. (a) Would you rather do something else than come to school?
   (b) (If yes:) What else would you rather do?
   (c) How could school be changed to make it better for you?

Administrators/Supervisors

The study team will attempt to interview all curriculum assistants, history supervisors, assistant superintendents, and any other such persons who have some responsibilities for the American History program in the Washington schools. In an attempt to get a glimpse of the broad perspective of the history program, the following questions will be asked:

1. (a) What is the rationale, or the "thinking behind," the present American History (or the total social studies) program?
   (b) When was it developed?
   (c) How was the rationale developed?

2. (a) What changes, if any, have been made in the American History program during the past three to five years?
   (b) If there were changes, why were they made?
   (c) If there were changes, have they been evaluated; what kind of evaluation was it; what did the evaluation show?

3. (a) What is the person's reaction to the problem on which the HERO study centers?
   (b) Is there any direct attempt in the present American History program, in Washington, to help Negro children "identify" themselves in American History? (Write down where specific details can be found, if any are claimed.)

(c) Would this person favor an attempt by HERO to develop such a program and would he be willing to help implement it in Washington?

(d) What would be the organization and procedures that would be necessary in order to implement the program in Washington? (Committees, Board approval, help for teachers, inservice meetings, etc.?)

Other Information

If possible, the study team would like to be provided with the following information:

1. What is the range and median achievement in reading at each grade level in each of the two chosen schools?

2. Is there any special information that the study team should know about any of the schools or neighborhoods in which the study team will be interviewing?

3. Are there any standardized achievement test results in history or social studies available for pupils in the schools where interviews will take place? If so, what are the ranges and medians for each grade?

4. May we have several samples of actual teacher-made tests used in American history courses, units, lessons?